



Winter Safety – and German Law --Require Winter Tires

As Winter 2006 approaches, the Installation Management Agency – Europe reminds motorists that German law regarding the use of winter tires has changed from last year.

In a rule change which took affect May 1, using tires “suitable to the weather” is required. Driving with summer tires on icy or snowy roads is now a traffic offense, which can lead to a fine of 20 to 40 Euro. Additionally, insurance companies can deny coverage to motorists driving with summer tires on wintry roads. In the case of a traffic accident in adverse winter conditions, police can assign blame to a motorist without snow tires, regardless of who actually caused the accident.

How do you know if tires meet the winter standard? Tires labeled with "M+S" or with a "snowflake" are considered legal if their tread pattern is at least 1.6 millimeters. For best safety, however, winter tires with a tread pattern of less than 4 millimeters should be replaced. Tires can be inspected for safety at AAFES garages, tire shops or road service providers such as ADAC.

Chains should be used if you plan to drive in heavy snow or ice. A combination of summer tires and snow chains is not a safe alternative.

When should you begin using winter tires? Under the new law, there is no set date; road and weather conditions dictate use. Many experienced motorists put winter tires on at the first snow and leave them on until early spring. It's easier than changing back and forth and avoids the possibility of being stuck without the right tread if the weather suddenly changes for the worse.

Historically, German roads begin to see snow around Thanksgiving.

The new changes are covered in article 2, paragraph 3, of the German road traffic regulation.